

REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 23 AUGUST 2018

GREENSPACE & BIODIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 Support the funding application to the North and South Aberdeenshire LEADER programmes in relation to the Greenspace and Biodiversity development.

2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 In line with the current Parks & Open Spaces Strategy a significant adjustment to the maintenance and development of open spaces is both required and necessary.
- 2.2 Changes to the mix of open space classification will support the necessary changes, and also result in improved biodiversity in towns and villages. This requires a planned approach which is likely to lead to a reduction in amenity grass areas with compensatory increase in more "natural" classifications (such as increased tree planting; woodland areas; and wildflower meadows/areas).
- 2.3 Amenity greenspace and other areas of civic space are an important feature of Aberdeenshire and currently the maintenance regimes are designed to ensure that they are maintained to a good standard. However, there are opportunities to redesign current practices to concentrate available resources on high priority areas, while also increasing biodiversity wherever appropriate. The aim is to ensure that open spaces are varied, of good quality and fit for multipurpose uses.
- 2.4 Change of this nature is always likely to be contentious and it is important that through the development of this planned approach there is a strong focus on community engagement. It is recognised that there is a need to set up a process that ensures the full benefits of the changes are properly communicated to all users.
- 2.5 To take this initiative forward it is proposed that a dedicated resource is required.
- 2.6 A short term project team comprising of Officers from Landscape Services, Economic Development and the Environment Team within Planning & Building Standards has already been established. This team have considered the best manner to deliver this engagement and propose to make an application to the LEADER programme for funding.
- 2.7 A joint bid would be made to both the North and South Aberdeenshire LEADER programmes seeking a total grant of £120,000. This will allow for the

employment of two officer posts for a period of 18 months to progress this work and establish the required change, focussing on the community consultation element.

- 2.8 In general terms the remit of these Officers will be work with a diverse range of stakeholders to:
- I. identify opportunities for enhancement and development of local greenspace;
 - II. help communities to appreciate the benefits of biodiverse open space;
 - III. help communities to learn about the importance of trees and pollinators and their natural environment; and
 - IV. develop an integrated approach to open space management across key areas in and around settlements within Aberdeenshire.
- 2.9 The Officers will also seek to provide the opportunity to develop practical enhancements at sites for the benefit of biodiversity, carbon reduction and local communities as part of a wider green network. They will attend site meetings with local authority personnel and consider options for management/redesign of selected sites.
- 2.10 The Committee are asked to approve the application to the northern LEADER programmes in support of the above project officers.
- 2.11 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are they are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to take a decision on this item in terms of Section F1.1 d) of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as this relates to policy issues and resource matters associated with Roads, Landscape Services and Waste Management.
- 3.2 Should the LEADER application be successful the Director of Infrastructure Services would appoint the staff necessary to undertake the project. This would be in terms of Section A.1 of Part 2B - List of Officer Powers, wherein the Director has delegated authority to:

“Appoint employees as required by them and as permitted in terms of this Scheme of Governance to discharge the functions within the overall budget approved by the Council for their service or services.”

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 There will be no differential impacts on people with protected characteristics resulting from the progression of this project.
- 4.2 There are no staffing and financial implications. The project would be 100% externally funded. However, if the LEADER application is rejected other sources of funding or methods of carrying out this work will need to be explored. If LEADER funding is approved this will have no financial

implications for the Council other than Aberdeenshire Council would fund initially and then claim back the money from the LEADER programme.

- 4.3 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level. The Climate Change Priority is highlighted in both the Corporate Risk Register (ACORP010) and at Strategic Level on the Directorate Risk Register (ISSR004). One of the challenges is to develop innovative approaches to reduce Scotland's carbon footprint and provide solutions for climate change adaption. The LEADER Green Spaces and Pollinators project will tackle issues such as reducing the carbon footprint and provide solutions for climate change adaption as well as define a model the council and private business can follow when managing green spaces.

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